# Iceland

## Land of Fire & Ice



**Atlantic Puffins by Adrian Burne**

*Lying far out into the North Atlantic Ocean, the volcanic island of Iceland is the land between two continents: a land of fire and ice with its Viking heritage. While Iceland doesn't have a long list of breeding birds, those that do occur are in many cases abundant, with globally important populations of waders, wildfowl, and seabirds. In fact, its towering cliffs are among the largest seabird colonies on the planet, with five species of breeding auk, including Thick-billed Murre (Brünnich's Guillemot), while the numerous lakes and wetlands are teeming with an array of divers, ducks, and waders, such as Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-necked Phalarope and Purple Sandpiper. Top of many people's wish list is the world's mightiest falcon, Gyr Falcon, and Iceland has a healthy population of this supreme predator. As a backdrop to all this there is also the country itself, with its volcanoes, lava fields, glaciers, spouting geysers, mud pools, dramatic coasts and black sand beaches making for spectacular and other-worldly scenery at every turn!*

# *Itinerary & Map*

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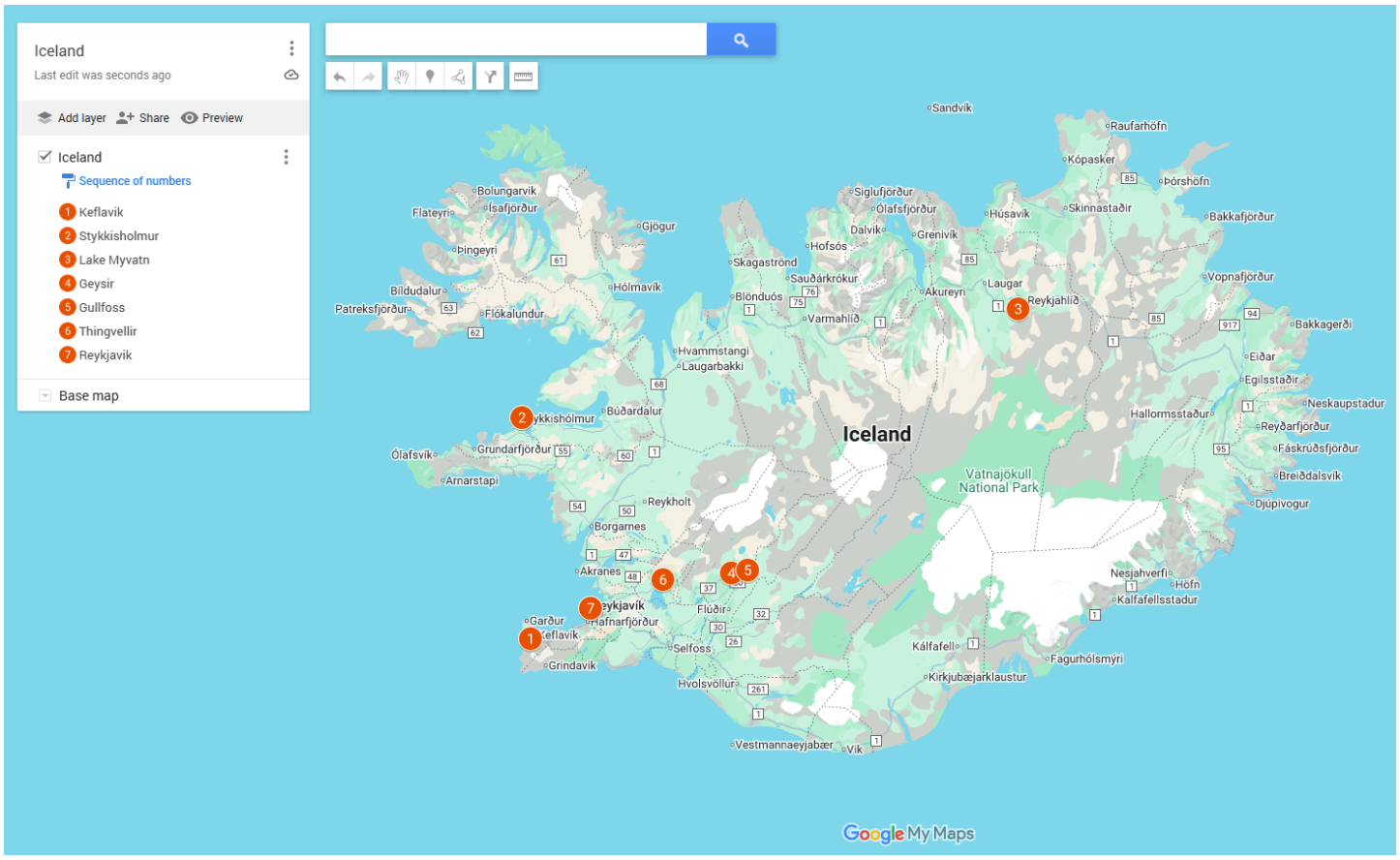
| **Day 1** | **Arrival in Keflavík & transfer to Stykkishólmur** |
| **Day 2** | **Snaefellsnes Peninsula** |
| **Day 3** | **Stykkishólmur to Myvatn** |
| **Days 4 & 5** | **Lake Myvatn & nearby geothermal sites** |
| **Day 6** | **Lake Myvatn to Geysir** |
| **Day 7** | **Geysir, Gullfoss and Thingvellir** |
| **Day 8** | **Reykjanes Peninsula & final departure** |



## *Birding sites in detail*

**Keflavik to Stykkishólmur.** Birding starts on arrival at Keflavík International Airport in southwest Iceland, where arriving birders are sometimes welcomed by Snow Buntings singing from the terminal building! After leaving Keflavik behind, we'll head north, perhaps finding one of the local Harlequin Ducks on the various rivers, whilst we are certain to encounter moulting flocks of Whooper Swans en route to Stykkishólmur.



**Red-necked Phalaropes by Nigel Redman**

**Stykkishólmur & Snæfellsnes Peninsula.** The lakes on the flat plains of the spectacular Snæfellsnes Peninsula hold very dense numbers of breeding Red-throated Diver and Arctic Skua, while on the rivers tumbling down from the mountains, we may encounter more Harlequin Ducks.

Roadside lakes along the southern edge of the peninsula hold a typical mosaic of wetland species including Common Loon (Great Northern Diver) and Horned Grebe, and scarcer ducks such as Northern Shoveler. At the end of the peninsula is the Snæfellsnes National Park, crowned by the glacier-filled volcano Snæfellsjökull. The lava fields here are home to Rock Ptarmigan and the *leucorhoa* race of Northern Wheatear.

The attractive basalt cliffs at the end of the peninsula hold colonies of all five breeding Icelandic auks, including Thick-billed Murre, Razorbill and large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwake, while Arctic Tern is abundant along



**Snow Bunting by Nigel Redman**

the coast. Killer Whales are also frequently seen along this section of the coastline. The northern side of the peninsula is quite different in character to the southern shore and has huge numbers of breeding Glaucous Gull and will give gull enthusiasts the chance to study large gulls in every possible plumage!



**Brünnich's and Common Guillemots (Thick-billed and Common Murres) by Nigel Redman**

**Stykkishólmur to Myvatn.** We make the long drive eastwards today, heading to one of the tour highlights, Lake Myvatn. Along the way, we will make strategic stops for Whooper Swan, while keeping a close eye on the deeply indented coastline that dovetails our route for Common Loon. The surrounding tundra hosts Rock Ptarmigan, and good eyes will be needed to find individuals sporting well camouflaged plumage at this time of year.

Family flocks of Pink-footed Goose form 'skeins' overhead, while scanning rivers may reveal more Harlequin Duck. Wooded areas in the surrounds hold good numbers of Common Redpoll, Eurasian Wren, and the abundant Redwing, while we should see our first Common Gulls by the roadside. As we get close to Lake Myvatn, we shall make a quick stop Goðafoss, one of the most impressive waterfalls in Iceland.

**Lake Myvatn.** Lake Mývatn (Midge Lake) is quite simply one of Europe's great birding destinations. The midges, actually harmless *chironomids*, are the mainstay of life at this bird-rich lake, home to thousands of breeding wildfowl.

Barrow's Goldeneye, at its only European breeding site, is common here and shares the lake with other ducks such as Long-tailed and Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon and Greater Scaup, while American vagrants including Ring-necked Duck and American Wigeon are recorded regularly at this superb spot. Harlequin Duck are common on the Laxá River, which flows out of the lake, while Horned Grebes are confiding and highly photogenic on the lake itself. Common Loon and Red-throated Divers



**Common Loons by Nigel Redman**



**Pink-footed Geese by Clayton Burne**

provide the background noise, while arguably the main attraction at the lake, Gyr Falcon, can occur anywhere in the area. This, the world's largest and most powerful falcon, takes advantage of the great numbers of Rock Ptarmigan, wildfowl, and waders here, and several pairs breed in the vicinity. Its smaller cousin, the Merlin, also breeds in the area, and if we are lucky, we might see Short-eared Owl hunting in the 24-hour daylight.

With fascinating geology and geothermal sites around the lake, a day at Mývatn is an unforgettable experience and will no doubt be yet another highlight on this fascinating tour. If time allows, may also visit Europe's largest waterfall, the thundering Dettifoss.

Specialist knowledge may take us to Iceland's only known Long-tailed Jaeger nest or visit the lonesome Arctic Loon that has taken up summer residence for several successive years.



**Strokkur Geysir by Adrian Burne**

The profusion of midges and other insect life mean that the wetlands surrounding the main lake are often teeming with wildfowl, including Common Redshank, Dunlin, European Golden Plover, Red-necked Phalarope, Whooper Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser and Long-tailed Duck.

**Lake Myvatn to Geysir.** We have another long drive, moving from the northeast of Iceland back to the geothermal hotspot of Geysir. Most of our day will be spent travelling.

We shall end the day at Gullfoss, the 'Golden Waterfall'. An iconic waterfall that presents an amazing view of the falls and surrounding landscape. Fed by Iceland´s Langjökull Glacier down the Hvitá River, the water plunges 32 meters over a two stage drop into the canyon below. We'll spend the night perfectly located in the town of Geysir, a few minutes from the eponymous Great Geysir and Strokkur Geysir.

**Geysir & Thingvellir.** No visit to Iceland would be complete without visiting the world-famous geothermal field at Geysir. We will spend the morning admiring and photographing these amazing spectacles, whilst also keeping an eye out for Merlin that sometimes breed nearby. We move onwards to Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park.

Situated on the rift valley that marks the crest of the mid-Atlantic Ridge, this is the boundary between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates that are slowly tearing Iceland apart. The park is also the historical seat of the Icelandic parliament and was declared a National Park precisely 1000 years after the first parliamentary proceedings took place in 930.



**Harlequin Duck by Nigel Redman**



**Gyr Falcon by Richard Thomas**

**Reykjanes Peninsula.** On our final morning we head out to the Reykjanes Peninsula, a barren, lunar like landscape visiting the small village of Sandgerði and the Gardskagi point. Offshore we should find good numbers of Northern Gannet, Common Loon and Razorbill, while other pelagic species could include Manx Shearwater or perhaps European Storm Petrel, and even the odd Humpback Whale if we are very lucky. Our last stop of the morning is the Reykjanestá headland, which is plastered with hundreds of Black-legged Kittiwake and their nests. About ten miles off the coast is the island of Eldey, site of the last known breeding pair of Great Auk which were killed in 1844. We'll then continue through the mossy lava fields of the Reykjanes peninsula, reaching Keflavík International Airport, where the tour will conclude.

***Whale Watching options.** Whale watching is good to excellent year-round in Iceland. Commonly species seen include Minke and Humpback Whales, White-beaked Dolphin and Harbour Porpoise. Bookings for whale watching tours either before, or after this birding tour can be made here.

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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| **Overall Ease** |  | Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels. Long hours due to limited darkness. |
| **Birding Ease** |  | Undemanding. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. |
| **Accommodation** |  | Comfortable. |
| **Walking / Trails** |  | Mostly short walks on flat ground, with some areas of uneven/rocky ground (optional) |
| **Vehicles / Roads** |  | Good quality sealed roads & unsealed dirt roads. Some very long drives. |
| **Photography** |  | Reasonable. No dedicated hides. |
| **Annoyances** |  | Some long drives & lots of midges (harmless) at Myvatn. Lunch options are limited, mostly to gas stations. |

## *Financial Arrangements and Important Notes*

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All breakfast from day 2 to day 8;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services.

Tour exclusions:

- **All lunches and dinners**;
- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (**including bottled water** and mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Tips (including local guides, drivers and hotels);
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement**: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**Tipping**: As noted above, gratuities are NOT included on this tour.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**

- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 18kg (40 lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- **No lunches or dinners are included on this tour.**
- Laundry facilities are scare to non-existent.
- Fitness: This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a generally good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of are very comfortable, although room sizes are on the smaller size of what you may have come to expect elsewhere.

**Seasonal Timing & Weather Variability**
This tour is scheduled to coincide with what has historically been the most productive period for birding in the region. However, weather patterns, including temperature, rainfall, snow cover, wind strength and wind direction, as well as broader environmental factors such as food availability, can significantly influence migration timing, breeding activity and bird distribution from year to year. In some seasons, key events such as migration peaks, breeding cycles or post-breeding dispersal may occur earlier or later than average, and the duration of these peak periods can be surprisingly brief. At migration bottlenecks in particular, prevailing wind conditions can have a major impact on the volume and diversity of birds moving through an area on any given day. While our itinerary is designed around long-term historical patterns and offers excellent birding prospects, no fixed-date tour can guarantee that it will coincide precisely with the absolute peak of every seasonal phenomenon. Guests whose primary objective is to experience a specific migration event or seasonal spectacle at its peak may wish to consider a Tailor-made Tour, where travel dates and locations can be adjusted closer to departure in response to prevailing conditions.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

The tour will depart mid-morning from Keflavík International Airport (IATA: KEF) on day 1 and will conclude around mid-day at Keflavík International Airport (IATA: KEF) on day 8.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Keflavík International Airport (IATA: KEF) is the main port of entry for international flights into Iceland and is well serviced by Icelandair and several other airlines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

**DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.**